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Dr. Sarah Kennel Named VMFA's Aaron Siskind Curator of Photography and Director of the Raysor Center
New Position Leads Efforts Focused on the Museum's Growing Photography Collection



Dr. Sarah Kennel

Richmond, Virginia — The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Sarah Kennel to the position of Aaron Siskind Curator of Photography and Director of the Raysor Center at VMFA. She will begin the newly developed position in September. Kennel comes to VMFA from the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia, where she has served as the Donald and Marilyn Keough Family Curator of Photography and most recently organized the exhibition *Underexposed: Women Photographers from the Collection*.

“We are delighted to have someone with Sarah’s deep knowledge, thoughtful vision and extensive experience joining the curatorial team at VMFA,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA’s director and CEO. “She will play a leading role in building the photography program and shaping the museum’s plans for an exciting new space devoted to collecting, caring for and exhibiting works on paper.”

VMFA’s photography collection features works from the past 180 years and includes special collections of Virginian, Hungarian-American and African American artists, including the Louis Draper archive that formed the basis of the museum’s current travelling exhibition, *Working Together: Louis Draper and the Kamoinge Workshop*. Kennel will organize a major Aaron Siskind retrospective exhibition based on the comprehensive collection of 8,000 photographs VMFA received from the Aaron Siskind Foundation in 2020, as well as administer the annual Aaron Siskind Prize. She will also provide the vision and leadership for the Raysor Center, a dedicated Photography, Prints and Drawings Study Center that forms part of the museum’s upcoming expansion slated for completion in 2025. The VMFA’s collection of

works on paper, including photography, numbers nearly 26,000 and includes exceptionally robust holdings in European prints from the 17th to 19th centuries.

“I am thrilled to join the dedicated staff at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts during a transformative time for both the museum and Richmond,” Kennel said. “I am excited to build a photography collection whose richness and depth will serve as a source of pride for the museum and the broader region. I also look forward to presenting engaging and timely exhibitions that drive new scholarship as well as to developing an integrated center for the study of works on paper,” Kennel said.

“As an internationally recognized leader in her field, Sarah Kennel is the perfect choice to be the Aaron Siskind Curator of Photography at VMFA,” said Michael Taylor, VMFA’s Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Art and Education. “Sarah’s experience of organizing award-winning exhibitions, building museum collections and publishing scholarly catalogues make her an outstanding addition to VMFA’s curatorial team. In addition to serving as VMFA’s first Curator of Photography, Sarah will also be the inaugural Director of the Raysor Center, and we look forward to seeing the creative ways she will approach the study and display of works on paper at the museum.”

Prior to joining the High Museum in 2019, Kennel was the Byrne Family Curator of Photography at Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) in Salem, Massachusetts, where, with Sarah Greenough of the National Gallery of Art, she co-curated the touring exhibition of the Virginia photographer’s works in *Sally Mann: A Thousand Crossings*. The exhibition catalogue written by Kennel and Greenough was awarded best photographic book at the 2018 Festival International du Livre d’Art et du Film. At PEM, she also curated exhibitions on the 19th-century photographer John Thomson and organized the retrospective exhibition *Order of Imagination: The Photographs of Olivia Parker*

As a curator at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., Kennel organized numerous exhibitions and catalogues for *Charles Marville: Photographer of Paris* (2013), *Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes, 1909–1929: When Art Danced with Music* (2013), *The Serial Portrait: Photography and Identity in the Past 100 Years* (2012), and *In the Darkroom: Photographic Processes before the Digital Age* (2009). She has also written extensively on the relationship between painting and photography in 19th-century France.

Kennel taught at Princeton University, the University of California, Berkeley and George Washington University. Among her many awards, she received two fellowships at the National Gallery of Art — the Mary Davis Predoctoral Fellowship at the Center for the Advanced Study in the Visual Arts and the Samuel H. Kress Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellowship. She earned a doctorate and a Master of Arts in art history from the University of California, Berkeley and a Bachelor of Arts from Princeton University.

About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States. VMFA, which opened in 1936, is a state agency and privately endowed educational institution. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, exhibit, and interpret art, and to encourage the study of the arts. Through the Office of Statewide Partnerships program, the museum offers curated exhibitions, arts-related audiovisual programs, symposia, lectures, conferences and workshops by visual and performing artists. In addition to presenting a wide array of special exhibitions, the museum provides visitors with the opportunity to experience a global collection of art that spans more than 6,000 years. VMFA’s permanent holdings encompass nearly 50,000 artworks, including the largest public collection of Fabergé outside of Russia, the finest collection of Art Nouveau outside of Paris, and one of the nation’s finest collections of American art. VMFA is also home to important collections of Chinese art, English silver, French Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, British sporting, and modern and contemporary art, as well as renowned South Asian, Himalayan, and African art. In May 2010 VMFA opened its doors to the public after a transformative expansion, the largest in its history.

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission. For additional information, telephone 804.340.1400 or visit www.VMFA.museum.

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Media Contacts

Jan Hatchette | 804.204.2721 | jan.hatchette@VMFA.museum

Amy Peck | 804.773.1791 | amy.peck@VMFA.museum

Ume Farwa | 804.204.2702 | ume.farwa@VMFA.museum

200 N. Arthur Ashe Blvd., Richmond, VA 23220